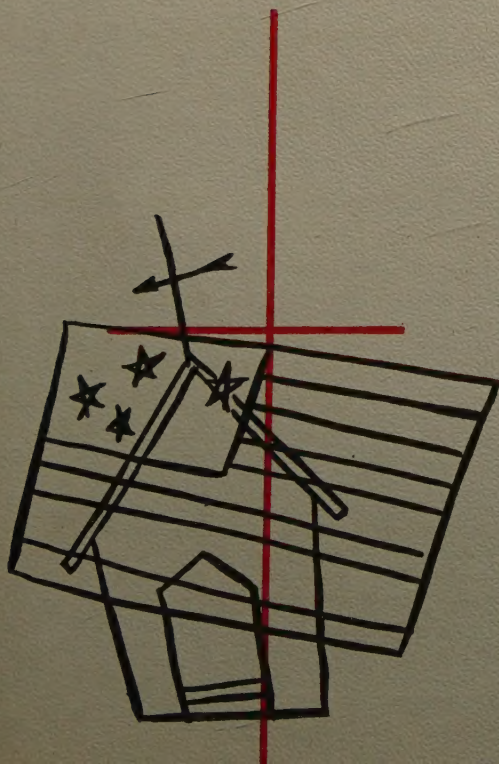


SOCIAL ACTION

Religion as a Social Force

Our Response to the New
World Situation



SOCIAL ACTION

Vol. XIX, Number 6 May, 1953

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SOCIAL ACTION is published six times a year, in October, November, December, February, March and May by the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches and by the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y. Liston Pope and Fred Hoskins; Elmer J. F. Arndt, Chairmen, Ray Gibbons and Huber F. Klemme, Directors, respectively.

Subscription \$1.50 per year; Canada \$1.60 per year. One to 9 copies, 25c each; 10 to 99 copies, 20c each; 100 or more copies, 15c each. Re-entered as second-class matter October 17, 1951, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879, by the Council for Social Action. Copyright, 1953, by the Council for Social Action.

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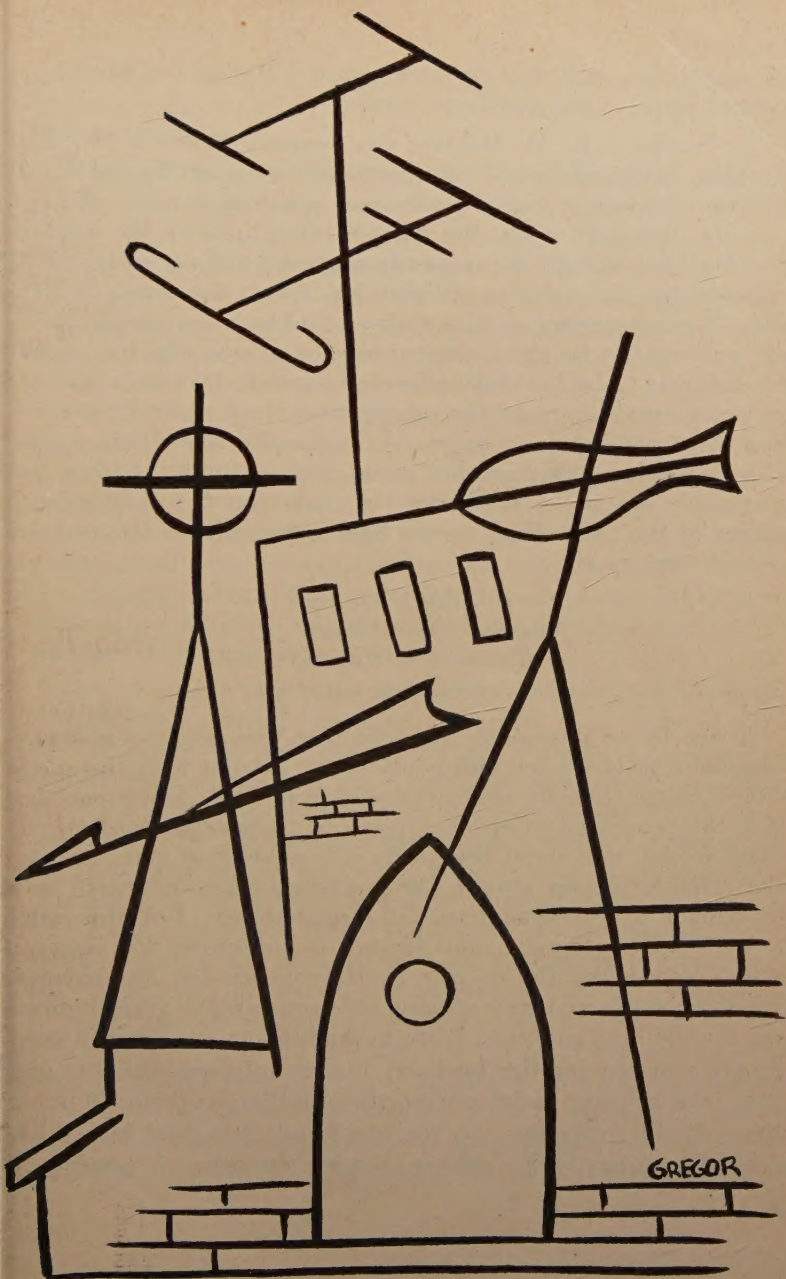
The views expressed in the magazine do not necessarily represent the official policies of the Council for Social Action. The editor seeks articles from persons of assured competence and presents their views as worthy of thoughtful consideration by our readers.

(We are happy to publish in this issue two outstanding recent addresses on the problems with which this magazine deals. The first, "Religion as a Social Force in America," by Liston Pope, was given at Smith College at a meeting honoring S. Ralph Harlow, for many years professor of social ethics in the religion department of that school. The second address, "Our Response to the New World Situation," by Herman F. Reissig, was presented at a consultation on "United States Responsibility in the World Community," held in New York City this spring.)

Religion as a Social Force in America

By Liston Pope

There have been many general theories of the relation of religion to culture, but most of them turn out to be excessively monolithic and extreme when submitted to the touchstone of actual relations between religion and society in the past and the present. Marx represented religion as fundamentally the "cry of the oppressed creature," and as with all things else in society, its origin was to be found in economic factors. In itself religion was interpreted as a secondary aspect of culture rather than a primary force underlying social change. At the opposite extreme, probably 95 per cent of the clergymen now living in America have preached at one time or another that religion is the fundamental force for social betterment: the improved status for women, the establishment of hospitals and colleges, and most other beneficent aspects of society are freely credited to religious impulse. In more restrained fashion, Max Weber and others have argued that Protestant ethics was a crucial factor in the rise



of capitalism, and that in some sense religion was thereby a central force of the first importance.

As Professor R. M. MacIver has argued, however, the real problem in the relation of religion to culture is not that of causal priority but rather that of permanent relations between the two spheres. But here again the most diverse theories are abroad. For Machiavelli, who is commonly supposed to have scrapped all religion, the truth is that religion has a very important role to play in guaranteeing social stability: God becomes an omnipresent policeman who never sleeps, and the prince who has taught his subjects to be faithful believers may thereby obtain greater peace of mind—because the prince must sleep part of the time. For Marx, religion is an opiate of the people; like a true opiate, it both deadens the pain that arises from economic misery and also dulls the nerve of action for removing the fundamental causes of the pain. Marx would have rejoiced at a stanza from an old time hymn:

“The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate.”

At the other extreme is the view that true religion is always prophetic in character and is always in tension with the established culture in any society in any age. This view holds that it is the proper function of religion to trans-value existing cultural values, to convert them into a new value system. Because the religious group always has a reference beyond itself, it is in danger of renouncing social responsibility. But this same transcendent reference may inspire and require the religious group to remake the society itself; concern for the ultimate meaning of life may pass quickly into concern for a fuller meaning for life here and now. Faith in the highest may lead to deep-rooted concern for the lowliest; higher religious insights may pass into broader social perspectives. Religious faith, in short, has a double reference: on the one hand, it is held by persons related to a particular culture, but on the other it points to a

God above and beyond all cultural achievements. It is asserted, therefore, that religion is always potentially revolutionary in its social significance.

Many other general theories have been advanced, with some of the more significant ones being closely associated with the names of Frazer and Gibbon and, more recently, Toynbee. Perhaps the most satisfactory theory of all has been proposed by Bergson who holds (though there is grave danger here of over-simplification of his view) that a fresh religious impulse does break into a given society with creative and revolutionary force, and does succeed in reorganizing culture to greater or lesser degree. But the religious impulse itself soon becomes domesticated for the most part, and perhaps precisely to the degree that it does succeed in creating new cultural forms according to its own content. The creative impulse quickly becomes institutionalized, and its revolutionary power becomes transformed into a force making for social stability. In brief, the dynamic religious impulse becomes a vested interest, and subsequent religious impulses often must destroy or transform religious accretions as well as secular ones.

This excursion into general theories has been undertaken with a destructive purpose in mind primarily. The more carefully one examines the role played by any religion in a particular culture over a period of time, the more ambivalent the relation of religion to culture is seen to be. No general theory proves quite adequate for interpretation of the varieties of interaction between religion and society, at least so far as a modern society is concerned. (And there is a great deal of evidence to support this same conclusion with regard to preliterate societies as well.) Religion has been on occasion an extremely conservative force; on other occasions, it has been genuinely revolutionary in intent and in consequences. It has been priestly; it has been prophetic. It has been an opiate; it has been a powerful stimulant. It has couched itself too completely in terms of a particular culture; it has broken existing cultural boundaries and has renounced the existing order—or transformed it. Sometimes it has been pre-occupied with raising the church budget; at other

times it has been obsessed with raising the oppressed. It has made peace with iniquity, and it has sought to redeem the world.

Confronted by this ambivalence, there are those who seek to differentiate between true religion and false religion, and doubtless this is a perennial task for each of us. Walter Lippmann tried twenty years ago to distinguish between low religion and high religion. A classical distinction within Christianity contrasts priestly religion and prophetic religion. Every religion tends to designate itself as a true religion and all alternatives as false. Lest we spend our time in definitions, important as that undertaking might be, I propose that we proceed with our discussion of religion as a social force in America under the assumption that each of us knows in general what the Christian religion has been in America and that each will decide for himself whether that religion has been true or false to its charter and obligations.

II

There can be little doubt that American society has been profoundly shaped by religious influences in the past. Obviously time is available now only for a few generalizations and illustrations rather than for extensive historical proof.

In the colonial period of our history, Christian doctrines and the Christian churches were of primary importance in teaching the values and shaping the forms by which America has sought to judge herself and to organize her life ever since. An old cliché holds that European pioneers went to South America searching for gold, while their colleagues came to North America searching for God—and that the difference in progress between the two continents is explained by this difference in original motivation. It is obvious that this grand generalization does not deserve serious analysis. If it were true, it would be extremely ironic that those who came searching for God ended up having most of the gold! But it is true, beyond argument, that religious motives and powerful religious convictions played a prominent part in the colonization of America, and in the subsequent organization of life in this country.

Perhaps Calvinism and John Locke were of approximately equal importance in shaping our political processes and structures, with a certain amount of help subsequently from Rousseau and other philosophers of the eighteenth century. Calvin's insistence on the necessity of the restraint of evil prominently influenced the American constitutional system, and most especially the doctrine of checks and balances in the structure of government.

In the field of economic activities, Adam Smith's theories and certain Protestant teachings came to remarkable coincidence on the American frontier, and each type of thought seemed made to order for colonial conditions. Protestant individualism and the industrial virtues of Calvinism were especially relevant to frontier conditions, where self-reliance, hard work, sobriety, and thrift were necessary for survival. As the frontier moved westward, these virtues went with it; the individual was real, and his success depended on his own efforts. The individual arrived ahead of social institutions or systems and subsequent institutions were shaped to considerable degree by his religious faith and his moral virtues.

It has often been argued that religion lapsed from its creative role into that of a conservative force in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. There are respects in which this thesis seems to be true; a more largely secular radicalism provided many of the dynamic social forces during those decades. But the picture was not one of unrelieved conservatism. Professor Ralph Gabriel has pointed out that, during the middle period of American history,

The secular faith of democracy and the religious faith of evangelicism were mutually interdependent. They complemented one another. There was no suggestion of rivalry between them. Together they provided the American with a theory of the cosmos which gave significance and direction to human life, and with a theory of society which gave a meaning not only to the relation of the individual to the group, but of the United States to the congregation of nations.*

For the most part, clerical leaders during the first half of the

* *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, page 38.

nineteenth century were rather orthodox and conservative in economics—though it should be remembered that their spiritual grandsons reversed their position at the founding of the American Economic Association in 1885, with 23 clergymen being among the original members. But it was during those same early decades of the century that the abolitionist movement began to gather strength, and religious forces played a commanding part in support and opposition to it. It was also during those decades that the peace movement began to grow strongly in America, largely under religious inspiration and leadership. Even the great evangelists of the New Awakening, with all their emphasis on individual salvation, did not necessarily overlook the problems of the social order. Charles G. Finney, one of the most powerful of them, taught that the converted man is not only reformed but also a reformer: Christians should set forth “with all their hearts,” he said, “to search out all the evils in the world, and to reform the world, and to drive out iniquity from the earth.” “Religion is something to *do*,” he insisted, “not something to wait for.” And Finney knew the desperate needs of his own time: he entreated the Christian church, “Ten thousand voices cry out from heaven, earth and hell, ‘Do something to save the world!’ Do it now. O, now, or millions more are in hell through your neglect.” Finney’s own views on social issues may not have been laudable; he appears to have stirred up a good deal of controversy as president of Oberlin College, as illustrated in the fact that the Ladies’ Literary Society at Oberlin in 1862 held a debate on the proposition: “Resolved that President Lincoln is not so bad a man as President Finney thinks he is.” But it is not legitimate to set the evangelical movement and the movements for social reform in opposition to each other, as has been so often attempted.

III

Doubtless the best articulated effort at social reform in the history of American Protestantism was the social gospel movement. The phrase “social gospel” has come to have ambiguous usage and is often misunderstood. It has two perfectly legitimate

meanings. On the one hand, it is sometimes used to designate the social implications of the Christian gospel, and in this sense the social gospel has been a perennial feature of Christian teaching, and will continue to be so as long as Christianity seeks to relate its gospel to the affairs of the world and to developments in history.

The other usage of the phrase relates particularly to the individuals, theories, and organizations that comprised the social gospel movement from about 1880 to 1920. Perhaps some of the ambiguity will be cleared up if we say that the social gospel movement had a particular version of the Christian social gospel. As is the case with all social movements, this one arose from many previous developments; its antecedents have been carefully delineated in the standard works by Howard Hopkins and Henry May. Probably the most important factors underlying the new movement were the revised doctrine of man and his possibilities, as formulated by Horace Bushnell and his colleagues: the impact of the social crisis after the Civil War, as expressed especially in the industrial upheaval between 1877 and 1895; and, not least of all, the spirit of optimism and of progress that pervaded those decades.

Amid the parlous days of the mid-twentieth century, we find it rather difficult to understand how the spokesmen of the social gospel movement could have been so hopeful and so enthusiastic about their programs of social reform. Washington Gladden declared in 1893:

Our laws are to be Christianized; the time is coming when they will express the perfect justice and the perfect beneficence of the Christian law. . . . The administration of justice is to be Christianized. . . . Doubtless this millennial perfection of state is a great way off, but it is the goal toward which we are journeying. . . .

Two years later the Reverend George D. Herron was even more sanguine:

The political appearing of Christ is . . . more than a vision, and no dream, but the accomplished fact with which nations and institutions must begin to reckon, and the distinction and glory of our age.

Walter Rauschenbusch was generally more cautious than other

spokesmen for the social gospel, but he shared the basic optimism about social possibilities. He wrote in 1912:

Even a Christian social order cannot mean perfection. As long as men are flesh and blood the world can be neither sinless nor painless. . . . But within the limitations of human nature I believe that the constitutional structure of the social order can be squared with the demands of Christian morality.

Rauschenbusch considered that many spheres of society in the United States had already been Christianized; the family, the Church, education, and the political life. The economic order was the principal citadel still uncaptured but it was under heavy assault from the working class: "If the banner of the Kingdom of God is to enter through the gates of the future, it will have to be carried by the tramping hosts of labor."

The social expectations of the social gospel leaders were not untypical of the age. Francis G. Peabody summarized the outlook in America during the first decade of this century in saying that "never before were so many people concerned with the amelioration of social conditions and the realization of social dreams." The organization of the Methodist Federation for Social Service in 1907 and the Federal Council of Churches in 1908 reflected these purposes and gave institutional form to efforts for their realization.

Social optimism surmounted the shock of the First World War, which was quickly interpreted as a war to end war. It persisted through the intoxication (despite Prohibition) of the twenties, and was only somewhat benumbed and muted by the depression of the thirties—which produced a major crop of panaceas.

But the social gospel movement as such began to break up just after the First World War. To be sure, its main line was continued by such durable and great leaders as Bishop McConnell, E. Stanley Jones, and the editor of the *Christian Century* (which had changed its name to that phrase in 1900 as an earnest of its own hopes for the century just dawning). And a majority of the writers in a series of *Christian Century* articles in the late 1930's on the general theme, "How My Mind

Has Changed," still adhered pretty much to social gospel perspectives and emphases.

But for the most part the impulses of the social gospel movement spread out in diverse directions after 1918. Some of its former adherents swung over to a complete reaction against their previous views; J. B. Matthews and Stanley High would be examples. Others attempted to combine the social passion of the movement with more orthodox theological doctrines. Reinhold Niebuhr is a great example of this tendency; often regarded by superficial interpreters as an opponent of the social gospel movement, he still confesses that his great heroes were Bishop McConnell and Walter Rauschenbusch. Still others went wholly into some movement of social reform, relegating religious perspectives and compulsions to the background: pacifism, prohibition, socialism, the group work movement, and many other social crusades drew considerable strength from the social gospel movement. A great many left clerical vestments behind in order to don academic hoods, most often in the field of sociology. (Albion W. Small and William Graham Sumner had given precedence for this transition in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Sumner gave up the Episcopal ministry to become the founder of a new religion—the Sumner-Keller cult in which adaptation replaces love as the law of life, folkways take the place of ritual, and mores ascend to the throne of God.) A few social gospellers retained only the outward form of religious interest and invested their real faith in communism.

The social gospel movement has been a favorite target of theological critics for the last 25 years. Assuredly, the movement was open to vigorous criticism. In theological matters, it tended to substitute belief in progress for the Christian hope for redemption; it relied on human enlightenment to forestall the judgment of God; it focused its hopes on history and tended to neglect eternity. In social philosophy, it was too optimistic with regard to the malleability and perfectibility of human institutions and too superficial in its analysis of society. The social gospellers too often wore their Christian faith on their sleeves, and were willing to give unqualified approval to social move-

ments obviously imperfect in character and in possibilities. In 1871 the Reverend Jesse Henry Jones proclaimed, "The Republican Party is the Party of Jesus Christ." Thirty years later the Reverend George D. Herron was quite certain that no man could be a Christian and not be a socialist. The cooperative movement, profit sharing, Christian love, the method of non-violence, and the Golden Rule, were embraced as adequate solvents for all social difficulties.

It is quite clear in retrospect that the social gospel movement was largely middle class in character, urban in setting, and almost exclusively clerical in leadership. It never made really successful contact with the labor movement or with any other large segment of the population other than middle class liberals. It relied principally on preaching, educational methods, discussion groups, and fugitive publications to transform a society headed increasingly toward power conflicts and mass upheavals.

Nevertheless, the social gospel movement left its enduring impression on American life. It played a highly significant part in the ethical revivification of the churches and in the reorientation of seminary curricula. In the world outside the churches, it gave impetus to the liberal forces reflected in the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and at length Franklin D. Roosevelt. As already indicated, it added strength to the secular movements for social reform, from the muckrakers at the turn of the century to the post-war planners of World War II. It presented an effective challenge to the economic *laissez faire* theories and to the individualism so central in the American creed and brought new emphasis to the doctrines of Christian brotherhood and human solidarity. And it has left as its heritage to the churches the various agencies for social action to be found in nearly every major denomination, and in the interdenominational and ecumenical movements.

In the confused and timorous days in which we now find ourselves, after the shocks imposed by two world wars and a benumbing depression, we look back on the social gospel movement with a certain wistfulness. Doubtless those who were caught up in its enthusiasm were overly optimistic and more than a

little naive. But they had a sense of clear direction and purpose, and they generated momentum as they went along. Today, in contrast, a soberer estimate of man and of social possibilities has replaced the buoyant expectations at the turn of the century. The humanist, anti-theological mood of the social gospel movement has been shattered by the reiterated assertion that man is a sinner. Utopianism and perfectionism are in theological disrepute. Hope is defined in eschatological rather than sociological terms.

Belief in progress toward perfection has been reduced to the more modest hope for proximate justice. Use of the phrase "the Kingdom of God on earth" betrays the fact that the user is an outmoded liberal, either uninformed about recent trends or else stiff-necked and incurable. The Kingdom of God is not an ideal social structure; rather, it is the reign of God despite man's sin or the power of God over all things. Jesus was not an ethical teacher or the architect of a new society; He was One Sent, He is the Christ.

In part the more cautious estimate of social possibilities is derived from the revival of interest in theology and the recapture of ancient Christian insights that had been largely discarded between 1850 and 1930. In part it has resulted from the collapse of a number of fond crusades such as prohibition, pacifism, and socialism, and from complete disenchantment about "the significant Russian experiment." Forms and vitalities of social injustice are seen to be more intransigent and perennial than has been assumed, and the complexities of social problems at the present time are baffling. The explanations of social evil by Rousseau (bad institutions) and Marx (the one institution of private property) are rejected as oversimple, and reliance on good will and love as social solvents is regarded as naive. All social movements and reforms are designated as ambivalent and each social achievement is hailed with the suspicion that it contains within itself the seeds of new problems.

I V

What, then, can we say in summary of religion as a social force in America? Perhaps the most appropriate metaphor

would be that of a stepchild: American society is a stepchild of Christian—or more exactly Protestant—parentage, though the line of descent has been intersected, obscured, and all but destroyed by non-Christian forces in history. We are nevertheless children still to considerable degree of the Puritans with their theocratic concern for society, of the abolitionists with their passion for freedom and equality, of the pacifists with their dream of peace and the reformers with their demands for social justice, and of the social gospelers with their radiant vision of a Kingdom of God on earth. Often when we are least aware of it, our accents betray our indebtedness to the biblical and Christian heritage. A social scientist analyzing our contemporary culture carefully can find innumerable deposits from the Christian centuries, though these have often been fossilized into forms from which life and meaning have long since fled.

At the present time, the influence of religion on American society appears to be indirect, immeasurable, and all told rather minimal. Except on selected issues, such as the appointment of a representative to the Vatican, the Protestant churches exercise little discernible influence on American politics, though candidates for public office frequently refer piously to Almighty God in the closing paragraphs of their campaign speeches. The churches have helped to keep alive idealism with regard to world order, and their influence was noticeable in the formulation of the United Nations' charter, but the great decisions with regard to international relations are made largely within the context of power considerations and conflicting secular ideologies rather than consciously under the surveillance of a Lord above all nations.

With respect to divisions among the American people, the churches have largely adapted themselves to these divisions and thereby reinforced them, rather than reflecting even in their own life the unity of mankind under God. Economic factors have been more important than religious ones in defining the American class system—Fibber McGee showed native sociological wisdom recently in defining the upper class as “a bunch of crumbs held together by their own dough.” But churches have

likewise become symbols of class status in nearly every community of the land, so far as careful community studies in the last two decades have indicated. With regard to racial lines, the churches are probably the most segregated major institutions in American society—seldom from deliberate design on their part, but they have not succeeded in overcoming segregated residential patterns and other barriers that permit the churches all too easily to remain segregated.

Even the values elevated to places of supremacy in our American culture have come to be largely non-religious or anti-religious in character, with material values occupying the place of greatest importance. Times Square is in many ways a symbol of our civilization. Gilbert Chesterton's remark on seeing it for the first time is a clear commentary on our values: "What a beautiful sight," he said, "if only a man could not read." Here is the most powerful nation in history, using technologies of which our grandfathers did not even dream, to the glorification of commodities essentially cheap or trivial in character.

All this may seem to add up to a pleasant picture so far as the past is concerned but a rather dismal one as to our own present and future prospects. Surely no thoughtful observer in 1953 can conclude that the solutions to our social problems will be easy, or that the Christianizing of our social order can be quickly accomplished. But one who has been laid hold of by the Christian faith accepts difficulties as a challenge rather than as an invitation to despair. The Christian faith begins with a search for the purposes of God, not with absorption in the customs of man. It begins with the confession that we have erred and strayed like lost sheep. But this faith matures in confidence in the power and the righteousness of God, and it is fulfilled in the sense of certainty that God reigns and that he has chosen us to be his children and to do his will. This faith requires that we rise above the despair that easily enervates us and the individualism in which we continue to stray from our common task, and that in the unity of the faith we seek again to teach an errant world the nature of its true foundations.

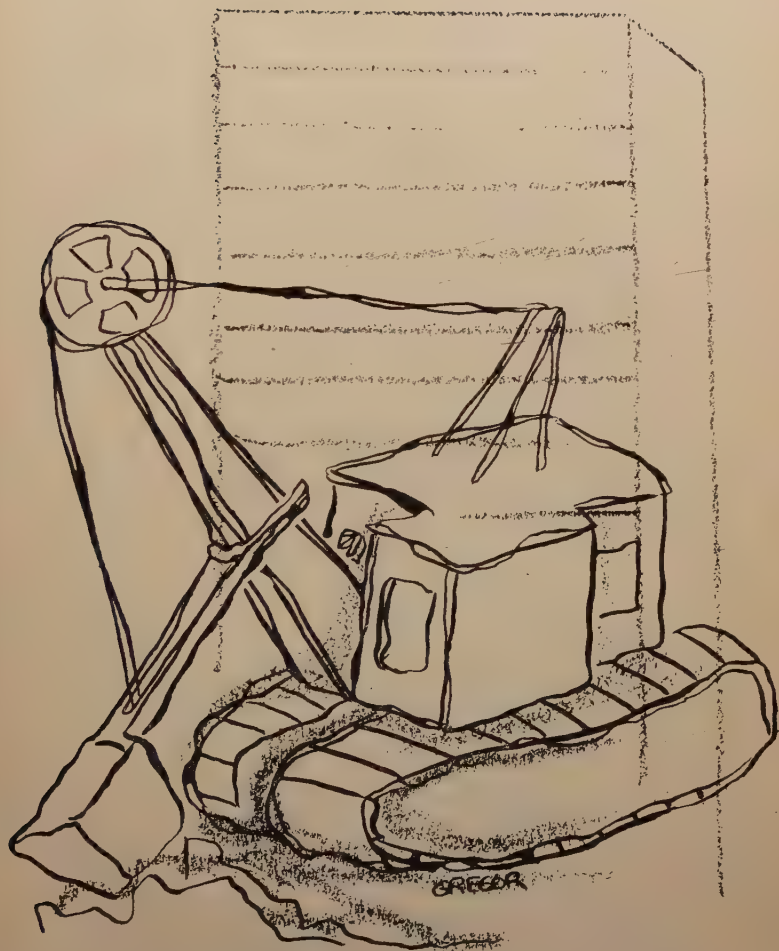
Our Response to the New World Situation

By Herman F. Reissig

I may say that I was somewhat inhibited in my preparation of this talk, if only for a moment, by a remark made by Frederick Lewis Allen. Defending himself against the charge that his book, *The Big Change*, is too optimistic, Mr. Allen said that some of the gripes came from intellectuals and the intellectual he said has "believed that the special hallmark of the intellectual was that he knew everything was in a much worse condition than most people realized, and that although the mass mind, in its heedless way, enjoyed 'I Love Lucy' and had no further thoughts, he, the intellectual, heard in the air the unmistakable note of approaching doom."

I escaped from the mild attack of mental paralysis which this sharp thrust brought on by recalling that religious leaders are not necessarily intellectuals; their line runs back to the prophets of the Old and New Testaments—and these prophets still teach us primarily because they did not cry "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. Of course there remains for us, in the present situation, the problem of putting the finger on the defects and dangers in the American mind without overlooking the signs of health. We shall have to be careful not to counter the hysteria of former Congressman John T. Wood or of the D.A.R. with a hysteria of our own.

It may be well to preface the day's discussions with a little self-examination and confession. Is not our head-shaking over the disillusionment and spirit of retreat among Americans caused in part by our own inner feeling of dismay? Some of us have been saying to our fellow Americans that they expected too much of the United Nations. We wag a finger at them and recommend less alternation between overconfidence and despair, a more adequate philosophy and a steadier spirit. But if the U.N. was



oversold, where were we when the overselling was being done? Did not most of us expect, at the end of the war, a more tranquil world than we have? Did we, who presume to teach, maintain from the beginning a perfect balance between the confidence required to get the U.N. going at all and such a sober awareness of the realities as to forestall a possible onslaught of disillusionment?

Is it not a fact that all of us—the religious and the non-religious, nationalists and internationalists, leaders and rank-and-file people—are living in a time whose problems are truly appalling—too great for human wisdom, too much for the wisest mind, and a severe test of the strongest faith? The disillusionment and retreat, the hysteria and the name-calling are reflections, not only of ignorance or wickedness, of unusual selfishness or cowardice; they reflect an objective fact—the fact that our generation lives at a confluence of climactic world movements and forces of such intricacy and spread and power that neither our intelligence nor our faith is sufficient. And so we—all of us—feel insecure and are afraid. The more raucous and irrational cries of Americans have some of the same roots as the unease experienced by all of us, and we might be better leaders if we acknowledged the fact.

If some Americans cry for return to a world that has ceased to exist and others make charges that are foolish beyond the reach of rational argument, this calls, in the first place, not for scorn or even merely for a campaign to answer distortions with facts; it calls, in the first place, for some sympathy and for a sober setting forth of the basic contemporary situation which puts on all of us a heavy spiritual strain. We who try to teach others need, I think, for our own benefit and for the help of others to go beneath the laments of the isolationists and the proposals of Senator Bricker to the root of the situation. We need to remind ourselves of such facts as these:

Around us, in our time, is a five-fold—at least a five-fold—overturning. The sovereign nation-state world, with all its habits and securities, has gone to pieces, and there is a deep valley to be traversed before we build the new habits and

securities of the interdependent world. Is it any wonder that Americans are confused and afraid?

A world in which one-half of the people lived in non-self-governing territories and in which so much world stability and so much commerce were based on the colonial system, goes to pieces and fierce new demands for self-determination break in at the very moment when national self-determination is largely obsolete. Is it strange that there is a Babel of discordant voices?

The world of White Supremacy, in which for so long we have lived and which produced mountains of accumulated injustice and resentment, falls apart, and neither the old masters nor the new insurgents have the wisdom to make a smooth highway to brotherhood. Is it surprising that we should be shaken in spirit?

A world we have known since the dawn of civilization 6,000 years ago, in which the vast majority was, and had to be, grievously poor, with only a handful having access to the conditions of a decent life, crumbles now before the attack of the science which promises a more adequate answer to the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Is it extraordinary that the long "dumb resignation" of the millions, giving way now to explosive demands for release, should give us a stormy time, some among us reaching eagerly for the technical aid programs and other forms of help while others, not understanding the new situation, rush to the ramparts to defend their own high standards of living and denounce the "give away" programs?

A world of either static and unprogressive or of superficial religions, providing little guidance for men in their immediate needs, disintegrates under the impact of varied influences, leaving millions in all lands without the one thing which, next to food, man most needs—a religion that interprets his human situation and provides a compass for the earthly voyage. Where, in our contemporary world, social problems are most acute, there always and increasingly people turn away from their traditional re-

ligions, which means that they lose their wholeness and become potential customers of the fascists and communists. Is it odd that, with this religious failure, we should be in deep trouble?

And, finally, we have to deal with a philosophy and movement called communism which was, and is, given its powerful momentum chiefly by the fact that it was offered as some kind of solution to all these problems but which is now in fact history's most powerful and menacing combination of would-be savior and actual destroyer.

If we spent more time analyzing the basic world situation, thus showing our people why they are troubled and why, inevitably, there are all kinds of proposals, ranging from the relatively good to the fantastic and dangerous, our recommendation of the U.N., of free trade, of Point IV, of Universal Human Rights would get a better reception. We could then point out that the more irrational voices are the voices of people who, needing psychological help and spiritual regeneration more than mere information, are taking advantage of this general confusion, both to gain money and prestige and as an outlet for their emotional frustrations.

When, for example, Mr. John T. Flynn says on the radio and in print that the U.N. is "the world's number one trouble-maker," that "never in our history have the people of the U.S. been led into such an infamous trap as the United Nations" and that "Our people adopted the United Nations because they were lied to," his words would fall on less fertile ground if Americans understood that, given this terribly complex and difficult general situation, that is about what one would expect from a man with Mr. Flynn's type of mind. His kind of diatribe cannot be answered by a fact-sheet on the U.N.

On a slightly higher level is Senator Bricker's proposal for an amendment to the Constitution.* We must meet it with rational argument, as has been done by a committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. But the deeper insight is

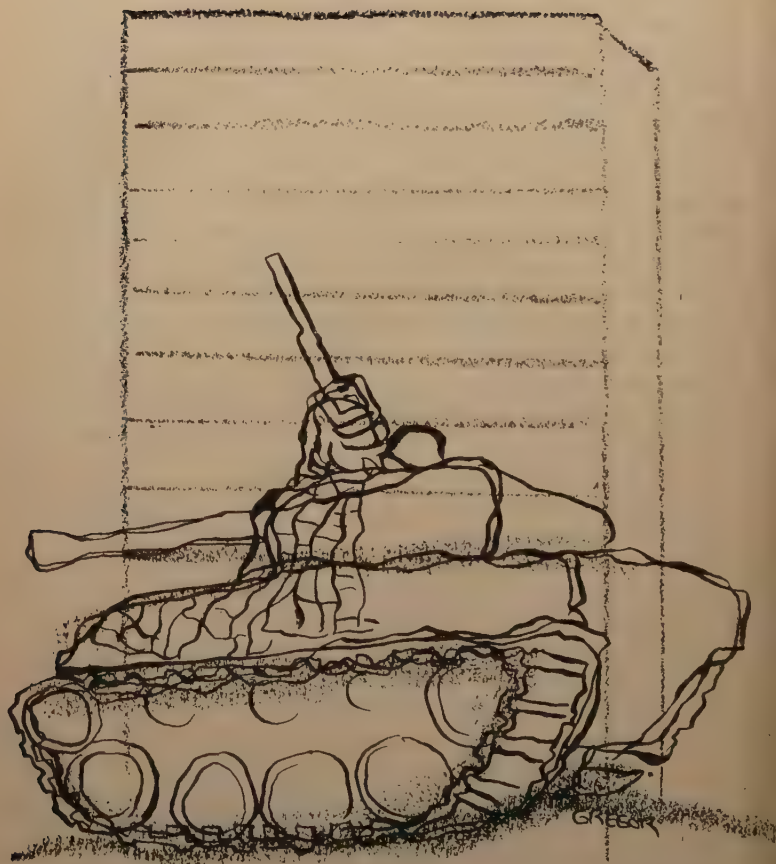
* See page 31 for the policy statement on the Bricker Amendment adopted by the Council for Social Action.

that some such proposals are about what we could expect in a time when the old nationalistic concepts and securities are disintegrating and there is deep anxiety because the new international institutions and protections are not yet adequate to the need.

In a small mid-Western city I was told last month not only of an organized local group which labels the U.N. and its supporters "subversive" but of a speaker who said to his audience, "Whenever you hear someone talk a lot about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man you can be pretty sure he's a communist." And the audience did not laugh him into silence. With such people—I mean the audience; the speaker is probably too neurotic for ordinary treatment—with people who will listen to that sort of thing you have to go way back—try to show them that we are not being pushed out of that old familiar world by communists or by idealists or professional internationalists but by technology. They need also some patient explanation of the fact that, in the Western world at least, men and women have tried to handle the basic insecurity of all human life, not by trusting in God but by trusting in the nation's greatness and power. They have answered the question, "From whence shall my help come?" with "My help cometh from the United States of America." (Or from La France or Deutschland!) When this main source of their inner security and prestige is disturbed they react with fear and anger. The reaction is about what you might expect. When our people recognize the true sources of their fears and angers they are in at least a little better position to do some rational thinking about such things as the U.N., UNESCO, immigration and foreign aid programs.

To summarize my first point, I suggest that more important than disseminating the facts about the various current ways of dealing with the new world situation—the U.N. and the rest—is, first, a sober, patient analysis of why we are where we are and, second, a psychological-theological interpretation of the reasons for our feverish responses.

Let us turn now to a brief examination of the overt attack on one world and its emerging institutions. We are all familiar with



what is being said: that the U.N. was planned by communists and is being used by them to further their goal of world-domination; that the proposed Covenants of Human Rights would, if adopted, abrogate the American Bill of Rights, compromise American sovereignty, and commit our country to state socialism; that UNESCO subverts patriotism and teaches children "to think of themselves as citizens of the world"; that the program of economic aid to other countries is "operation rathole"; that technical aid to underdeveloped areas subsidizes foreign economies at the expense of the American taxpayer; that some members of the U.N. are using their resources for the development of socialistic schemes while foolish Uncle Sam carries the main burden in Korea and in the general resistance of communism.

How important are these direct attacks? How many Americans are impressed by them? I, for one, do not know the answer. On the one hand are such facts as these:

1. Organizations with a considerable membership, commanding very respectable sums of money and whose pronouncements get a good deal of publicity, are saying some or all of these things. Among them are the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of the American Revolution, the American Bar Association, the Foundation for Economic Education, Spiritual Mobilization, the Christian Freedom Foundation, and the National Economic Council.

2. Newspapers with large circulations pour scorn on the U.N. and on international collaboration in general—among them the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Washington Times-Herald*. Many smaller newspapers and almost innumerable sheets, such as "The Cross and the Flag," ring the changes on the demand to "get the U.S. out of the U.N. and the U.N. out of the U.S."

3. Individual publicists and radio commentators are getting at least some attention with their campaigns of distortion and xenophobia.

4. In the 82nd Congress John T. Wood of Idaho introduced a bill calling for United States withdrawal from the U.N., and Con-

gressman H. R. Gross of Iowa assures his constituents that the U.S. is being taken for a ride by "a bunch of foreigners." More significant was the action of the House last April, cutting the recommended U.S. contribution to the U.N. by 2½ million dollars, and the obvious disinclination of many Congressmen and Senators to vote money for technical aid. Still more important is the Bricker resolution in the Senate, which 62 Senators, for one reason or another, joined in introducing. The attitude of many national representatives on these specific issues and the fate of the Genocide Convention are some indication of what might happen to a Covenant of Human Rights.*

5. The action of the school board of Los Angeles, and parallel attempts or actions in other places, with respect to UNESCO reveal the power of the leaders of the overt attack and the general support they can command.

6. The McCarran Committee attack on the loyalty of members of the U.N. Secretariat has seriously affected the morale of the Secretariat and has fostered among our people the suspicion that the U.N. may indeed be an alien and dangerous organization.

On the other side are such facts as these:

1. The public demand for tickets of admission to the U.N. is so great that groups must now make reservations as much as six months in advance. On one day the U.N. bookstore, in addition to the pieces given away, sold over 1,400 pieces of printed material.

2. The results of a poll taken last December by the American Institute of Public Opinion seemed to justify Dr. George Gallup in writing: "The Eisenhower Administration has a strong mandate from the nation's voters to back up the U.N. While the public has often been disappointed in the work of the U.N., the overwhelming majority consider it highly important to make the U.N. a greater success." Similarly, the results of a poll taken last June by the National Opinion Research Center of the Uni-

* Since March 16, when this speech was delivered, Secretary John Foster Dulles has stated that the Administration will not ask for the adoption of a Covenant of Human Rights.

versity of Chicago led its officers to speak of a "very high and increasing level of support of the U.N. among virtually all segments of the American public." To the question, "Have you heard or read any criticisms of the U.N. during the past few months?" 21 per cent in this poll answered "Yes" and 70 per cent "No."

3. The attitude of the national administration is, to put it negatively, certainly not hostile to the U.N. nor does it lean toward isolationism. So far as general profession goes, President Eisenhower, Mr. Dulles and Mr. Lodge have certainly given no aid and comfort to the go-it-aloners.

4. Almost the entire weight of organized religion in this country is on the side of the U.N. and of responsible and cooperative U.S. policies in world affairs.

5. Scores of national organizations—the American Association for the United Nations, the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women, to name only three of them, are doing good educational work and they receive very considerable support.

6. With respect to rank-and-file members of our churches and temples, the Jewish community is, in a word, "solid" on this matter. On the attitude of members of the Christian churches, I confine myself to personal experience—limited, but not, I think, without some significance. Travelling across the country and speaking on international relations about 60 per cent of my time, there is opportunity in almost all of the meetings for questions and discussions. I recall a women's meeting in New Jersey, a men's club in Mason City, Iowa, a forum in Sedalia, Missouri, a dinner meeting in Saginaw, Michigan, a church conference in Seattle. Within the past four weeks, there were 26 meetings in Iowa, Missouri and South Dakota. That many knew little about the U.N. and Point IV was evident. But of scorn for the U.N., of hostility to foreign aid programs I discovered in these meetings just none at all. In Iowa, with some trepidation, I mentioned the attitude of Congressman Gross. They grinned as if to say, "We know all about *him*!"

This is my personal experience. On the basis of it, I am ready

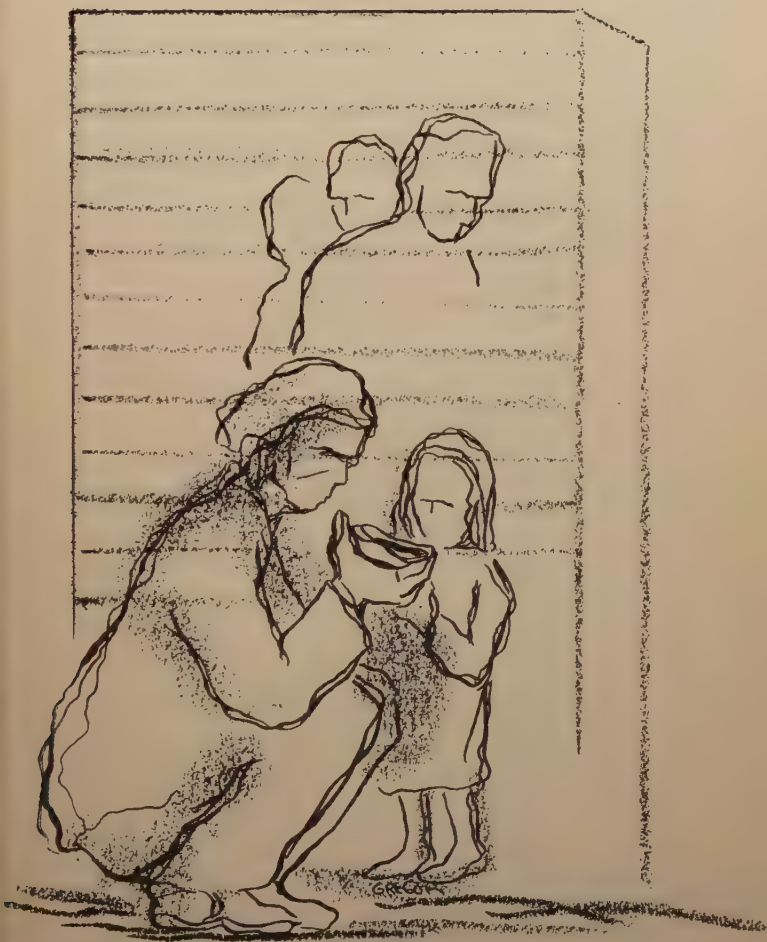
to say that in one Protestant denomination the need is simply what it has always been: to interpret the underlying facts in the total world situation and then to show how our various policies and programs are trying to deal with it.

Balancing these facts against one another my own tentative conclusion is about as follows: With the exception of a few local communities, the nationalist or neo-nationalist hate-the-U.N., go-it-alone campaign would not, in a plebiscite, get more than a handful of votes. To sit at one's desk and read their diatribes is a depressing experience. To go out among the people, listen to their questions and observe the way they take interpretation and facts is, for me at least, an encouraging experience. I am sure we should not help the persons and organizations mentioned earlier by advertising their names and arguments.

But this is not to say that the response of most Americans to the world situation is mature and dependable. It may well be true that, next to the Politbureau, American public opinion is potentially the most dangerous element in the world situation. There certainly has been some shift in public attitude since 1945, or, even since 1951. Comparing the current temper with 1920, there are at least these differences: there was then no immediate threat to our national security and, while the threat increases the need for international cooperation, it also increases the fear which makes people turn toward the old ways. The greater the danger the greater the xenophobia. In addition, the urge to go back to something familiar always becomes particularly vehement when it becomes finally clear that we cannot go back. Death struggles are not a pretty thing to watch.

Returning now to the psychological and theological factors which, it seems to me, ought to engage our central attention, I should describe them about like this:

1. The problem of a deep and pervasive feeling of insecurity. In one word, fear. On the deepest level, the American people are more afraid than they ought to be because for their inner courage they have depended too much on the stability and greatness of the nation. Nationalism was their true religion. This is proved by the fact that a man's religious creed, even his faith in



God, can be questioned with impunity, but fling the word "un-American" at him and he shivers as if alone in outer spiritual darkness. Isolationism is defense against attack on our actual god—the source of life's meaning and our refuge in time of trouble. God might or might not be, but here, my soul, is the United States of America!

There is also the perfectly legitimate desire for as much physical security in this world as we can contrive. Hitherto, Americans had reason to feel safe behind their national power. Now, however, the dependence of the industrial machine on far-away places and people and the airborne atomic bomb have obviously shaken the national bulwarks. What takes their place? A precarious and unpredictable system of alliances and an as-yet very weak international institution. We must help our people to see that their anxiety is not irrational, that they will have to live with it for some time and that there is no cure for it in nationalistic retreat.

Or consider the appalling selfishness revealed in talk about "give-away programs," the niggling, instead of enthusiastic, attitude toward Point IV, the miser-minded huddling around "our high standard of living." What is this? Is not selfishness almost always a reflection of some kind of inner insecurity? We do not really object to helping those in need. We are only afraid of ourselves being exposed to the winds. The ironic part of it is that so many Americans are still back in past centuries, where to give something away *did* mean having less for yourself. They do not know that what is mainly required now is not the older kind of charity but kinds of help that lead to mutual enrichment.

On the deepest levels we must deal with the fear that basically resists an intelligent foreign policy.

2. Americans are reacting with anger to the destruction of their optimism—our wonderful, adolescent optimism. For the first time in their all-conquering history, Americans are confronted with problems that cannot be described in simple terms and will not yield to simple, decisive action. We are having a hard time believing that the roll-up-your-sleeves, spit-on-your-hands-and-go-after-it approach will not get the desired results in

our contemporary world. The self-confident giant rages to find himself frustrated. He is not spiritually equipped for the long strain, the patient planning, the adjustments and concessions required of him by reason of his involvement in the whole world situation. His optimism hardly took account of the radical nature and the ramifications of evil. Consider, for example, a Christian minister who ought to know better, telling his congregation: "There must be no more shades of grey, no more right or left. There must be only black and white, right and wrong." No wonder he is angry and finds in every unsatisfactory situation a sinister plot! For evil, to him, is a simple, temporary thing, to be demolished by righteous and resolute action. This is not a creed taken from the Bible. This is the fruit of our short and fractional American experience.

So now, for the first time really involved in the world *as it is*, we are giving at least a mild exhibition of the tantrums. As Mark Doren put it the other day, "Now we are growing up and realizing that evil exists, and our expression of disillusionment is greater than in nations that have lived with it for centuries."* In so far as this optimistic attitude is shared by people in our synagogues and churches it is a terrible indictment of our spiritual leaders, who had all but buried the biblical teaching on man's radical sinfulness and creatureliness. If Americans are predominantly a religious people what kind of religion is it that permits them to be so surprised and hurt when the road is long and painful? Is it not our business as religious leaders to help them see these things?

3. There is evident in our current American response a reaching for power. It expresses itself both in the individual persons who reap financial gain and a sense of mastery by exploiting confusion and in our national inclination to force other peoples to do our will. We are not the first or only people to try to play God. But we Americans could help one another to understand that given, on the one hand, our habit of mastery over circumstances and, on the other, this new feeling of individual submergence under sheer numbers and powerful historical forces,

* *Book Review*, New York *Herald Tribune*, March 15, 1953

we are peculiarly tempted to rebel against being little and to reach out for the prestige and controls that will enable us to feel, "I am, after all, important and strong!" There is no cure for this attempt to provide a man-made worth and dignity, save in the religious teaching that, in spite of our littleness, we have a God-given and eternal value. We Americans, like all other human beings, are dust. But by the grace of God, and only by His grace, we are more than dust.

To name one more fundamental cause of American insufficiency for world leadership, we share with so many all over the world a spiritual vacuum which we try to fill with all sorts of negativisms and fanaticisms. If one doesn't have an authentic religion he can make a religion out of hating foreigners, hating minority groups, exposing communists, building an almighty military machine, elevating the American way of life to a universal and eternal norm. Europeans know that Americanism is superior to communism, but they are afraid of both when elevated to the status of religion. American leaders of authentic religion may find here their most important assignment. For there is no biblical parable more applicable to modern people, including Americans, than the parable of the eight unclean spirits who, finding a man whose soul was empty, swept and garnished, "went in and dwelt there. Even so shall it be unto this evil generation." (Matt. 12: 43-45) When a living faith in God goes out we probably will have little success in building faith in the United Nations.

I suggest, therefore, these ways of dealing with the present situation in the U.S. with respect to our own country's role in the world:

A great effort to give our people the facts about the U.N., UNESCO, Human Rights, Technical Aid.

More important, education on the underlying forces and movements which are pushing us, with irresistible force, out of the old familiar patterns.

More important still, a sympathetic psychological-theological interpretation of our immature and inadequate responses to the new situation.

The Bricker Amendment

The Congress of the United States has under discussion a proposed constitutional amendment which would restrict the present treaty-making powers of the President and the Senate, prohibit certain kinds of treaties and give Congress strict supervision over executive agreements.

We do not offer a judgment on the many points of legal interpretation related to the proposed amendment. We are principally concerned that no action be taken which would make more difficult, or even impossible, progress toward goals to which we as Christians are dedicated.

Both the religious perception of all men as members of one family under God and the technological advances of our time call for a much greater degree of mutual aid, of international consultation and action than has been true in the past. The aim of the American people should be the creation of true world community, based upon such concepts and practices as these:

The moral obligation of each nation to assist the people of all other nations in their struggle for peace, freedom, and the basic necessities of a good life;

The principle that the material advantages, the liberties and the spiritual goods of a nation should not only be protected for the benefit of its own people but accepted as a trust to be used for the benefit of all people;

The development of international agreements and institutions which express and further our obligation to one another and our essential unity.

It is well for the United States to have constitutional safeguards

This statement was adopted by the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches upon the recommendation of the International Relations Committee, May, 1953.

against the surrender of the basic rights and freedoms enjoyed by our people. But such safeguards should not assume the perpetual validity of all the prerogatives now reserved to the national state. They should not shut the door against new, and possibly desirable, interpretations of jurisdiction and new forms of international action.

No one is wise enough to see what matters presently held to be, in the words of the proposed amendment, "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of the United States," may in the future be deemed appropriate areas of international jurisdiction. It does not seem wise to place in the constitution a prohibition at once so vague and so inclusive as that in Section 2 of the proposed amendment which states that, "No treaty shall authorize or permit any foreign power or any international organization to supervise, control, or adjudicate rights of citizens of the United States within the United States enumerated in this Constitution or any other matter essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of the United States." The United States, to cite one example, is already on record as favoring, not only limitation of armaments by international agreement but, in the words of the President, "a system of inspection under the United Nations." Such inspection would certainly mean delegation to an international authority of a matter hitherto considered essentially within the jurisdiction of the nation. This section of the amendment appears to us an attempt to freeze what is, by force of circumstances, a fluid situation in the relationship of nations.

We believe that the way should be left open, under present constitutional provisions, for such agreements and such extensions of international jurisdiction as may be in the true interests of the United States and of the emerging world community.

SOCIAL ACTION—1953-54

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The two addresses appearing in this issue deal with the social task of religion in America, viewed by two social action leaders in Congregationalism.

Liston Pope is Dean of Yale Divinity School and professor of social ethics; he is co-chairman of the Council for Social Action. In his address he has summarized the theory, history and present standing of religion as a social force in America.

Herman F. Reissig, as International Relations Secretary of the Council for Social Action, is concerned with interpreting the underlying facts in the world situation, both in writing and in speaking to groups all over the country. In the address printed in this issue he has summarized the current American attitudes toward such things as the U.N., UNESCO, and foreign aid programs; the psychological and theological factors involved; and ways of dealing with the problem we face with respect to United States responsibility in the world community.

These addresses represent thoughtful appraisals of the history and present task of religion as a social force in America.